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From: Science Space and Tech Committee Press SST Press
Sent: Thur 6/8/2017 2:04:08 PM
Subject: Chairman Babin Opening Statement- An Overview of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration Budget for Fiscal Year 2018

For Immediate Release | June 8, 2017

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Chairman Babin Opening Statement

An Overview of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration Budget for Fiscal Year 2018

WASHINGTON - U.S. Rep. Brian Babin (R-Texas), chairman of the U.S. House Science, Space, and Technology Committee's Subcommittee on Space, delivered the following opening statement today at the Space Subcommittee hearing, *An Overview of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration Budget for Fiscal Year 2018.* Today's witness is **Mr. Robert Lightfoot, Jr.**. acting administrator, National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

As prepared for delivery:

NASA is a critical national investment in our future. Our nation has never faced a more challenging, relevant, or promising frontier than the vast reaches of outer space.

I am proud that this Committee clearly recognizes and demonstrates that U.S. leadership in space is a bipartisan priority. The recent passage and enactment of the 2017 NASA Transition Authorization Act this March is concrete proof of the bipartisan and bicameral commitment to NASA.

This budget reflects administration's commitment to the "continuity of purpose" described in the recent authorization. Honoring our commitments in space and maintaining a balanced portfolio are the surest ways for us to enjoy the full benefits of our space investments.

The numbers in this request are lower than the amounts in the enacted budget, which causes some concern. However, the preliminary budget blueprint was released before Congressional appropriations. Therefore, a lower request does not necessarily reflect a reduction in administration support for NASA. In fact, the current request is in line with recent levels appropriated by Congress. This goes a long way to fixing problems that have plagued NASA programs over the last eight years. This budget request is refreshing in that it does not propose slashing priority programs year-after year. This will allow NASA managers to execute programs in an efficient manner.

I want to reiterate the Committee's commitment to NASA's long-term goals as described in law. Mars remains the first interplanetary destination for humanity. NASA is encouraged to carry out any necessary intermediate missions — particularly to the Moon — provided those missions advance future interplanetary exploration.

Closer to home, the future of the International Space Station is a top concern. Currently, the ISS will operate until 2024 but the role of the ISS beyond 2024 must be addressed soon. Similarly, I am also interested in understanding what NASA's plans are for future space suit work.

Turning to NASA's scientific exploration, this budget request restores balance across NASA's science portfolio and supports critical work across the entire science directorate. Work continues on the James Webb Space Telescope, which (I am proud to say) is currently in my home district at the Johnson Space Center for testing. The budget supports a range of small, medium, and large science missions, including the flagship Europa Clipper and Mars 2020 rover missions.

During the Obama administration, the pipeline for outer-planet missions was allowed to run dry. This budget returns support for a robust planetary exploration program, which is a national priority. US leadership in space science is critical, in part because it supports so much of NASA's broader mission.

Under this budget, NASA Aeronautics will continue its work on innovative technologies including a low boom supersonic flight demonstrator and hypersonic flight. These programs continue to benefit our civil and military

aeronautics efforts.

NASA's work in the Space Technology Mission Directorate will be critical in future space exploration. Work on space technologies like laser communication, in-space propulsion, and power systems will allow human exploration to complement the robotic exploration of Mars and other celestial bodies.

NASA has many exciting projects and missions across its portfolio. Indeed, NASA may be on the threshold of one of the greatest inflection points in the history of space exploration. Soon, SLS, Orion, Dragon 2, and Starliner vehicles will take their first flights. The James Webb Space Telescope will see first light. Human presence in low-Earth orbit is maturing and the ISS will begin evolving to the next phase of its life. And soon, NASA will begin construction of the Deep Space Gateway, the first permanent human outpost beyond low-Earth orbit. Of course, this era of excitement will also be a time of high risk. But with Congressional and Administration budgetary and political support, the next decade could mark a new golden age of space exploration.

I thank Acting Administrator Lightfoot for his testimony and look forward to this discussion.

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